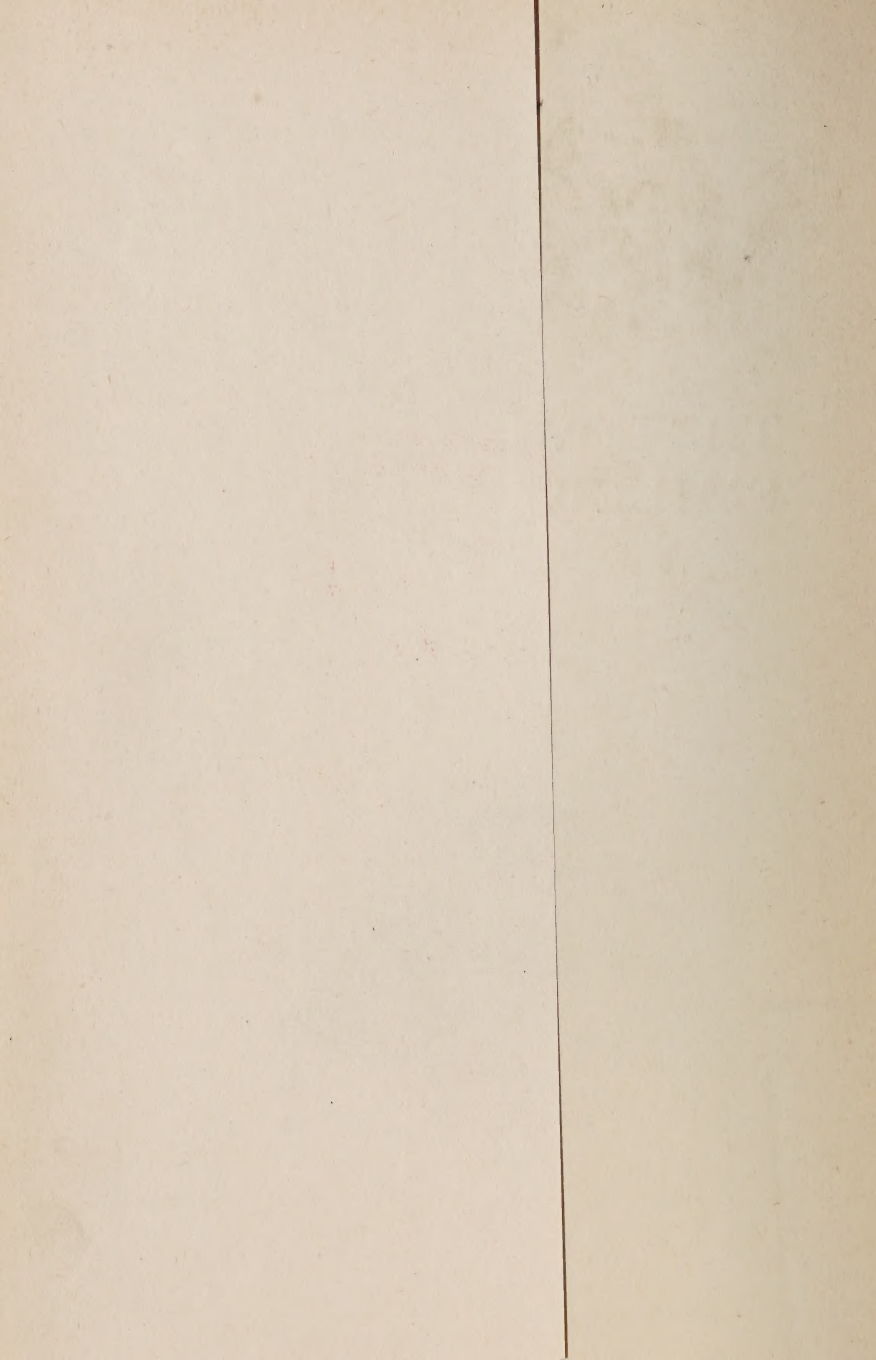
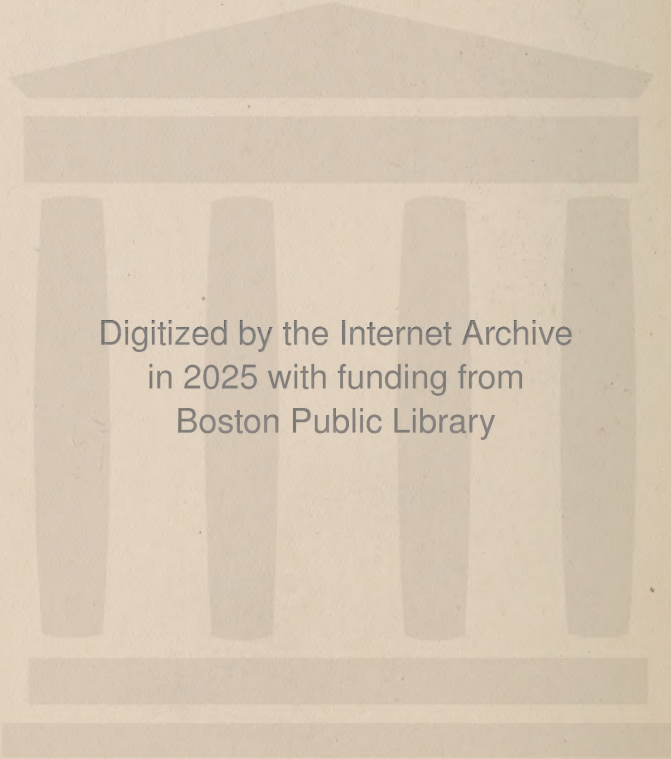




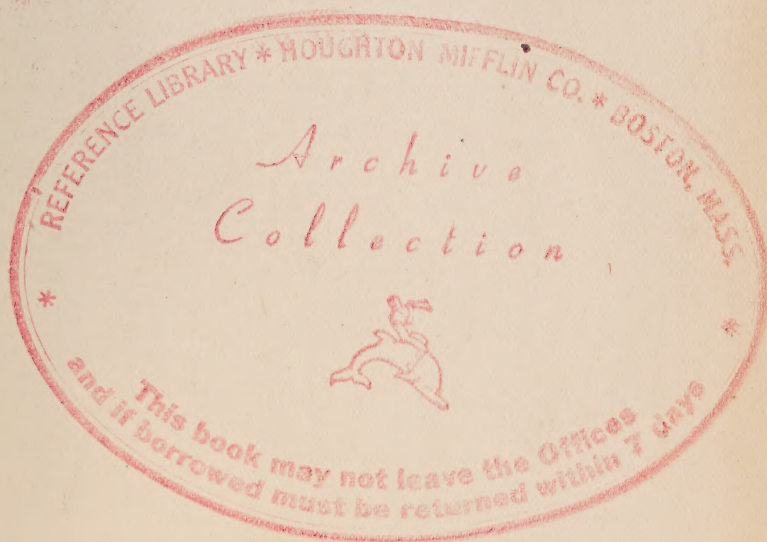
THE LOVE POEMS OF
EMILE VERHAEREN



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TRANSLATED BY
F. S. FLINT



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À CELLE QUI VIT À MES CÔTÉS

CONTENTS

THE SHINING HOURS

	PAGE
I. O the splendour of our joy	3
II. Although we saw this bright garden	4
III. This barbaric capital, whereon monsters withe	5
IV. The sky has unfolded into night	6
V. Each hour I brood upon your goodness	7
VI. Sometimes you wear the kindly grace	8
VII. Oh! let the passing hand	9
VIII. As in the simple ages	10
IX. Young and kindly spring	11
X. Come with slow steps	12
XI. How readily delight is aroused in her	13
XII. At the time when I had long suffered	14
XIII. And what matters the wherefores	15
XIV. In my dreams, I sometimes pair you	16
XV. I dedicate to your tears	17
XVI. I drown my entire soul in your two eyes	18
XVII. To love with our eyes	19
XVIII. In the garden of our love	20
XIX. May your bright eyes, your eyes of summer	21
XX. Tell me, my simple and tranquil sweetheart	22
XXI. During those hours wherein we are lost	23
XXII. Oh! this happiness, sometimes so rare	24

CONTENTS

	PAGE
XXIII. Let us, in our love and ardour . . .	25
XXIV. So soon as our lips touch . . .	26
XXV. To prevent the escape of any part of us .	27
XXVI. Although autumn this evening . . .	28
XXVII. The gift of the body when the soul is given	29
XXVIII. Was there in us one fondness . . .	30
XXIX. The lovely garden blossoming with flames	31
XXX. If it should ever happen that . . .	32

THE HOURS OF AFTERNOON

I. Step by step, day by day . . .	35
II. Roses of June, you the fairest . . .	36
III. If other flowers adorn the house . . .	37
IV. The darkness is lustral . . .	38
V. I bring you this evening, as an offering .	39
VI. Let us both sit down on the old worm- eaten bench . . .	40
VII. Gently, more gently still . . .	41
VIII. In the house chosen by our love . . .	42
IX. The pleasant task with the window open	43
X. In the depth of our love dwells all faith .	44
XI. Dawn, darkness, evening, space and the stars . . .	45
XII. This is the holy hour when the lamp is lit	46
XIII. The dead kisses of departed years . .	47
XIV. For fifteen years . . .	48
XV. I thought our joy benumbed for ever .	49
XVI. Everything that lives about us . . .	50
XVII. Because you came one day . . .	51
XVIII. On days of fresh and tranquil health .	52

CONTENTS

	PAGE
XIX. Out of the groves of sleep I came . . .	53
XX. Alas! when the lead of illness . . .	54
XXI. Our bright garden is health itself . . .	55
XXII. It was June in the garden . . .	56
XXIII. The gift of yourself . . .	57
XXIV. Oh! the calm summer garden where nothing moves! . . .	58
XXV. As with others, an hour has its ill-humour	59
XXVI. The golden barks of lovely summer . . .	60
XXVII. Ardour of senses, ardour of hearts . . .	61
XXVIII. The still beauty of summer evenings . . .	62
XXIX. You said to me, one evening . . .	63
XXX. "Hours of bright morning" . . .	64

THE HOURS OF EVENING

I. Dainty flowers, like a froth of foam . . .	67
II. If it were true that a garden flower . . .	68
III. The wistaria is faded and the hawthorn dead . . .	69
IV. Draw up your chair near mine . . .	71
V. Be once more merciful and cheering to us, light . . .	72
VI. Alas! the days of the crimson phlox . . .	73
VII. The evening falls, the moon is golden . . .	74
VIII. When your hand . . .	75
IX. And now that the lofty leaves have fallen	76
X. When the starry sky covers our dwelling	78
XI. With the same love that you were for me	79
XII. The flowers of bright welcome . . .	80

CONTENTS

	PAGE
XIII. When the fine snow with its sparkling grains	81
XIV. If fate has saved us from commonplace errors	82
XV. No, my heart has never tired of you .	83
XVI. How happy we are still	84
XVII. Shall we suffer, alas! the dead weight of the years	85
XVIII. The small happenings, the thousand nothings	86
XIX. Come even to our threshold	87
XX. When our bright garden was gay . . .	88
XXI. With my old hands lifted to your forehead	89
XXII. If our hearts have burned	90
XXIII. In this rugged winter	91
XXIV. Perhaps, when my last day comes . . .	92
XXV. Oh! how gentle are your hands . . .	93
XXVI. When you have closed my eyes to the light	94

THE SHINING HOURS

I

O THE splendour of our joy, woven of gold
in the silken air!

Here is our pleasant house and its airy
gables, and the garden and the orchard.

Here is the bench beneath the apple-trees,
whence the white spring is shed in slow,
caressing petals.

Here flights of luminous wood-pigeons,
like harbingers, soar in the clear sky of the
countryside.

Here, kisses fallen upon earth from the
mouth of the frail azure, are two blue ponds,
simple and pure, artlessly bordered with in-
voluntary flowers.

O the splendour of our joy and of ourselves
in this garden where we live upon our emblems.

II

ALTHOUGH we saw this bright garden, wherein we pass silently, flower before our eyes, it is rather in us that grows the pleasantest and fairest garden in the world.

For we live all the flowers, all the plants and all the grasses in our laughter and our tears of pure and calm happiness.

For we live all the transparencies of the blue pond that reflects the rich growths of the golden roses and the great vermilion lilies, sun-lips and mouths.

For we live all joy, thrown out in the cries of festival and spring of our avowals, wherein heartfelt and uplifting words sing side by side.

Oh! is it not indeed in us that grows the pleasantest and the gladdest garden in the world?

III

THIS barbaric capital, whereon monsters writhe, soldered together by the might of claw and tooth, in a mad whirl of blood, of fiery cries, of wounds, and of jaws that bite and bite again,

This was myself before you were mine, you who are new and old, and who, from the depths of your eternity, came to me with passion and kindness in your hands.

I feel the same deep, deep things sleeping in you as in me, and our thirst for remembrance drink up the echo in which our pasts answer each to each.

Our eyes must have wept at the same hours, without our knowing, during childhood, have had the same terrors, the same happinesses, the same flashes of trust;

For I am bound to you by the unknown that watched me of old down the avenues through which my adventurous life passed; and, indeed, if I had looked more closely, I might have seen, long ago, within its eyes your own eyes open.

IV

THE sky has unfolded into night, and the moon seems to watch over the sleeping silence.

All is so pure and clear; all is so pure and so pale in the air and on the lakes of the friendly countryside, that there is anguish in the fall from a reed of a drop of water, that tinkles and then is silent in the water.

But I have your hands between mine and your steadfast eyes that hold me so gently with their earnestness; and I feel that you are so much at peace with everything that nothing, not even a fleeting suspicion of fear, will overcast, be it but for a moment, the holy trust that sleeps in us as an infant rests.

V

EACH hour I brood upon your goodness, so simple in its depth, I lose myself in prayers to you.

I came so late towards the gentleness of your eyes, and from so far towards your two hands stretched out quietly over the wide spaces.

I had in me so much stubborn rust that gnawed my confidence with its ravenous teeth.

I was so heavy, I was so tired, I was so old with misgiving.

I was so heavy, I was so tired of the vain road of all my footsteps.

I deserved so little the wondrous joy of seeing your feet illuminate my path that I am still trembling and almost in tears, and humble, for ever and ever, before my happiness.

VI

SOMETIMES you wear the kindly grace of the garden in early morning that, quiet and winding, unfolds in the blue distances its pleasant paths, curved like the necks of swans.

And, at other times, you are for me the bright thrill of the swift, exalting wind that passes with its lightning fingers through the watery mane of the white pond.

At the good touch of your two hands, I feel as though leaves were caressing me lightly; and, when midday burns the garden, the shadows at once gather up the dear words with which your being trembled.

Thus, thanks to you, each moment seems to pass in me divinely; so, at the hour of wan night, when you hide within yourself, shutting your eyes, you feel my gentle, devout gaze, humbler and longer than a prayer, thank yours beneath your closed eyelids.

VII

OH! let the passing hand knock with its futile fingers on the door; our hour is so unique, and the rest—what matters the rest with its futile fingers?

Let dismal, tiresome joy keep to the road and pass on with its rattles in its hand.

Let laughter swell and clatter and die away; let the crowd pass with its thousands of voices.

The moment is so lovely with light in the garden about us; the moment is so rare with virgin light in our heart deep down in us.

Everything tells us to expect nothing more from that which comes or passes, with tired songs and weary arms, on the roads,

And to remain the meek who bless the day, even when night is before us barricaded with darkness, loving in ourselves above all else the idea that, gently, we conceive of our love.

VIII

As in the simple ages, I have given you my heart, like a wide-spreading flower that opens pure and lovely in the dewy hours; within its moist petals my lips have rested.

The flower, I gathered it with fingers of flame; say nothing to it: for all words are perilous; it is through the eyes that soul listens to soul.

The flower that is my heart and my avowal confides in all simplicity to your lips that it is loyal, bright and good, and that we trust in virgin love as a child trusts in God.

Leave wit to flower on the hills in freakish paths of vanity; and let us give a simple welcome to the sincerity that holds our two true hearts within its crystalline hands;

Nothing is so lovely as a confession of souls one to the other, in the evening, when the flame of the uncountable diamonds burns like so many silent eyes the silence of the firmaments.

IX

YOUNG and kindly spring who clothes our garden with beauty makes lucid our voices and words, and steeps them in his limpidity.

The breeze and the lips of the leaves babble, and slowly shed in us the syllables of their brightness.

But the best in us turns away and flees material words; a mute and mild and simple rapture, better than all speech, moors our happiness to its true heaven:

The rapture of your soul, kneeling in all simplicity before mine, and of my soul, kneeling in gentleness before yours.

X

COME with slow steps and sit near the garden-bed, whose flowers of tranquil light are shut by evening ; let the great night filter through you : we are too happy for our prayer to be disturbed by its sea of dread.

Above, the pure crystal of the stars is lit up ; behold the firmament clearer and more translucent than a blue pond or the stained-glass window in an apse ; and then behold heaven that gazes through.

The thousand voices of the vast mystery speak around you ; the thousand laws of all nature are in movement about you ; the silver bows of the invisible take your soul and its fervour for target,

But you are not afraid, oh ! simple heart, you are not afraid, since your faith is that the whole earth works in harmony with that love that brought forth in you life and its mystery.

Clasp then your hands tranquilly, and adore gently ; a great counsel of purity floats like a strange dawn beneath the midnights of the firmament.

XI

How readily delight is aroused in her, with her eyes of fiery ecstasy, she who is gentle and resigned before life in so simple a fashion.

This evening, how a look surprised her fervour and a word transported her to the pure garden of gladness, where she was at once both queen and servant.

Humble of herself, but aglow with our two selves, she vied with me in kneeling to gather the wondrous happiness that overflowed mutually from our hearts.

We listened to the dying down in us of the violence of the exalting love imprisoned in our arms, and to the living silence that said words we did not know.

XII

AT the time when I had long suffered and the hours were snares to me, you appeared to me as the welcoming light that shines from the windows on to the snow in the depths of winter evenings.

The brightness of your hospitable soul touched my heart lightly without wounding it, like a hand of tranquil warmth.

Then came a holy trust, and an open heart, and affection, and the union at last of our two loving hands, one evening of clear understanding and of gentle calm.

Since then, although summer has followed frost both in ourselves and beneath the sky whose eternal flames deck with gold all the paths of our thoughts ;

And although our love has become an immense flower, springing from proud desire, that ever begins anew within our heart, to grow yet better ;

I still look back on the small light that was sweet to me, the first.

XIII

AND what matters the wherefores and the reasons, and who we were and who we are; all doubt is dead in this garden of blossoms that opens up in us and about us, so far from men.

I do not argue, and do not desire to know, and nothing will disturb what is but mystery and gentle raptures and involuntary fervour and tranquil soaring towards our heaven of hope.

I feel your brightness before understanding that you are so; and it is my gladness, infinitely, to perceive myself thus gently loving without asking why your voice calls me.

Let us be simple and good—and day be minister of light and affection to us; and let them say that life is not made for a love like ours.

XIV

IN my dreams, I sometimes pair you with those queens who slowly descend the golden, flowered stairways of legend; I give you names that are married with beauty, splendour and gladness, and that rustle in silken syllables along verses built as a platform for the dance of words and their stately pageantries.

But how quickly I tire of the game, seeing you gentle and wise, and so little like those whose attitudes men embellish.

Your brow, so shining and pure and white with certitude, your gentle, childlike hands peaceful upon your knees, your breasts rising and falling with the rhythm of your pulse that beats like your immense, ingenuous heart,

Oh! how everything, except that and your prayer, oh! how everything is poor and empty, except the light that gazes at me and welcomes me in your naked eyes.

XV

I DEDICATE to your tears, to your smile, my gentlest thoughts, those I tell you, those also that remain undefined and too deep to tell.

I dedicate to your tears, to your smile, to your whole soul, my soul, with its tears and its smiles and its kiss.

See, the dawn whitens the ground that is the colour of lees of wine; shadowy bonds seem to slip and glide away with melancholy; the water of the ponds grows bright and sifts its noise; the grass glitters and the flowers open, and the golden woods free themselves from the night.

Oh! what if we could one day enter thus into the full light; oh, what if we could one day, with conquering cries and lofty prayers, with no more veils upon us and no more remorse in us, oh! what if we could one day enter together into lucid love.

XVI

I DROWN my entire soul in your two eyes, and the mad rapture of that frenzied soul, so that, having been steeped in their gentleness and prayer, it may be returned to me brighter and of truer temper.

O for a union that refines the being, as two golden windows in the same apse cross their differently lucent fires and interpenetrate!

I am sometimes so heavy, so weary of being one who cannot be perfect, as he would ! My heart struggles with its desires, my heart whose evil weeds, between the rocks of stubbornness, rear slyly their inky or burning flowers ;

My heart, so false, so true, as the day may be, my contradictory heart, my heart ever exaggerated with immense joy or with criminal fear.

XVII

To love with our eyes, let us lave our gaze of the gaze of those whose glances we have crossed, by thousands, in life that is evil and enthralled.

The dawn is of flowers and dew and the mildest sifted light; soft plumes of silver and sun seem through the mists to brush and caress the mosses in the garden.

Our blue and marvellous ponds quiver and come to life with shimmering gold; emerald wings pass under the trees; and the brightness sweeps from the roads, the garths and the hedges the damp ashen fog in which the twilight still lingers.

XVIII

IN the garden of our love, summer still goes on: yonder, a golden peacock crosses an avenue; petals—pearls, emeralds, turquoises—deck the uniform slumber of the green swards.

Our blue ponds shimmer, covered with the white kiss of the snowy water-lilies; in the quincunxes, our currant bushes follow one another in procession; an iridescent insect teases the heart of a flower; the marvellous undergrowths are veined with gleams; and, like light bubbles, a thousand bees quiver along the arbours over the silver grapes.

The air is so lovely that it seems rainbow-hued; beneath the deep and radiant noons, it stirs as if it were roses of light; while, in the distance, the customary roads, like slow movements stretching their vermilion to the pearly horizon, climb towards the sun.

Indeed, the diamonded gown of this fine summer clothes no other garden with so pure a brightness. And the unique joy sprung up in our two hearts discovers its own life in these clusters of flames.

XIX

MAY your bright eyes, your eyes of summer,
be for me here on earth the images of goodness.

Let our enkindled souls clothe with gold
each flame of our thoughts.

May my two hands against your heart be for
you here on earth the emblems of gentleness.

Let us live like two frenzied prayers strain-
ing at all hours one towards the other.

May our kisses on our enraptured mouths
be for us here on earth the symbols of our life.

XX

TELL me, my simple and tranquil sweetheart, tell me how much an absence, even of a day, saddens and stirs up love, and reawakens it in all its sleeping scalds?

I go to meet those who are returning from the wondrous distances to which at dawn you went; I sit beneath a tree at a bend of the path, and, on the road, watching their coming, I gaze and gaze earnestly at their eyes still bright with having seen you.

And I would kiss their fingers that have touched you, and cry out to them words they would not understand; and I listen a long while to the rhythm of their steps towards the shadow where the old evenings hold night prone.

XXI

DURING those hours wherein we are lost so far from all that is not ourselves, what lustral blood or what baptism bathes our hearts that strain towards all love?

Clasping our hands without praying, stretching out our arms without crying aloud, but with earnest and ingenuous mind worshipping something farther off and purer than ourselves, we know not what, how we blend with, how we live our lives in, the unknown.

How overwhelmed we are in the presence of those hours of supreme existence; how the soul desires heavens in which to seek for new gods.

Oh! the torturing and wondrous joy and the daring hope of being one day, across death itself, the prey of these silent terrors.

XXII

OH! this happiness, sometimes so rare and frail that it frightens us!

In vain we hush our voices, and make of all your hair a tent to shelter us; often the anguish in our hearts flows over.

But our love, being like a kneeling angel, begs and supplicates that the future give to others than ourselves a like affection and life, so that their fate may not be envious of ours.

And, too, on evil days, when the great evenings extend to heaven the bounds of despair, we ask forgiveness of the night that kindles with the gentleness of our heart.

XXIII

LET us, in our love and ardour, let us live so boldly our finest thoughts that they interweave in harmony with the supreme ecstasy and perfect fervour.

Because in our kindred souls something more holy than we and purer and greater awakens, let us clasp hands to worship it through ourselves.

It matters not that we have only cries or tears to define it humbly, and that its charm is so rare and powerful that, in the enjoyment of it, our hearts are nigh to failing us.

Even so, let us remain, and for ever, the mad devotees of this almost implacable love, and the kneeling worshippers of the sudden God who reigns in us, so violent and so ardently gentle that he hurts and overwhelms us.

XXIV

So soon as our lips touch, we feel so much more luminous together that it would seem as though two Gods loved and united in us.

We feel our hearts to be so divinely fresh and so renewed by their virgin light that, in their brightness, the universe is made manifest to us.

In our eyes, joy is the only ferment of the world that ripens and becomes fruitful innumera-ly on our roads here below; as in clusters spring up among the silken lakes on which sails travel the myriad blossoms of the stars above.

Order dazzles us as fire embers, everything bathes us in its light and appears a torch to us: our simple words have a sense so lovely that we repeat them to hear them without end.

We are the sublime conquerors who vanquish eternity without pride and without a thought of trifling time: and our love seems to us always to have been.

XXV

To prevent the escape of any part of us from our embrace that is so intense as to be holy, and to let love shine clear through the body itself, we go down together to the garden of the flesh.

Your breasts are there like offerings and your two hands are stretched out to me; and nothing is of so much worth as the simple provender of words said and heard.

The shadow of the white boughs travels over your neck and face, and your hair unloosens its bloom in garlands on the swards.

The night is all of blue silver; the night is a lovely silent bed—gentle night whose breezes, one by one, will strip the great lilies erect in the moonlight.

XXVI

ALTHOUGH autumn this evening along the paths and the woods' edges lets the leaves fall slowly like gilded hands;

Although autumn this evening with its arms of wind harvests the petals and their pallor of the earnest rose-trees;

We shall let nothing of our two souls fall suddenly with these flowers.

But before the flames of the golden hearth of memory, we will both crouch and warm our hands and knees.

To guard against the sorrows hidden in the future, against time that makes an end of all ardour, against our terror and even against ourselves, we will both crouch near the hearth that our memory has lit up in us.

And if autumn involves the woods, the lawns and the ponds in great banks of shadow and soaring storms, at least its pain shall not disturb the inner quiet garden where the equal footsteps of our thoughts walk together in the light.

XXVII

THE gift of the body when the soul is given is but the accomplishment of two affections drawn headlong one towards the other.

You are only happy in your body that is so lovely in its native freshness because in all fervour you may offer it to me wholly as a total alms.

And I give myself to you knowing nothing except that I am greater by knowing you, who are ever better and perhaps purer since your gentle body offered its festival to mine.

Love, oh! let it be for us the sole discernment and the sole reason of our heart, for us whose most frenzied happiness is to be frenzied in our trust.

XXVIII

Was there in us one fondness, one thought, one gladness, one promise that we had not sown before our footsteps?

Was there a prayer heard in secret whose hands stretched out gently over our bosom we had not clasped?

Was there one appeal, one purpose, one tranquil or violent desire whose pace we had not quickened?

And each loving the other thus, our hearts went out as apostles to the gentle, timid and chilled hearts of others;

And by the power of thought invited them to feel akin to ours, and, with frank ardours, to proclaim love, as a host of flowers loves the same branch that suspends and bathes it in the sun.

And our soul, as though made greater in this awakening, began to celebrate all that loves, magnifying love for love's sake, and to cherish divinely, with a wild desire, the whole world that is summed up in us.

XXIX

THE lovely garden blossoming with flames that seemed to us the double or the mirror of the bright garden we carried in our hearts is crystallized in frost and gold this evening.

A great white silence has descended and sits yonder on the marble horizons, towards which march the trees in files, with their blue, immense and regular shadow beside them.

No puff of wind, no breath. Alone, the great veils of cold spread from plain to plain over the silver marshes or crossing roads.

The stars appear to live. The hoar-frost shines like steel through the translucent, frozen air. Bright powdered metals seem to snow down, in the infinite distances, from the pallor of a copper moon. Everything sparkles in the stillness.

And it is the divine hour when the mind is haunted by the thousand glances that are cast upon earth by kind and pure and unchangeable eternity towards the hazards of human wretchedness.

XXX

If it should ever happen that, without our knowledge, we became a pain or torment or despair one to the other ;

If it should come about that weariness or hackneyed pleasure unbent in us the golden bow of lofty desire ;

If the crystal of pure thought must fall in our hearts and break ;

If, in spite of all, I should feel myself vanquished because I had not bowed my will sufficiently to the divine immensity of goodness ;

Then, oh ! then let us embrace like two sublime madmen who beneath the broken skies cling to the summits even so—and with one flight and soul ablaze grow greater in death.

THE HOURS OF AFTERNOON

I

STEP by step, day by day, age has come and placed his hands upon the bare forehead of our love, and has looked upon it with his dimmer eyes.

And in the fair garden shrivelled by July, the flowers, the groves and the living leaves have let fall something of their fervid strength on to the pale pond and the gentle paths. Here and there, the sun, harsh and envious, marks a hard shadow around his light.

And yet the hollyhocks still persist in their growth towards their final splendour, and the seasons weigh upon our life in vain; more than ever, all the roots of our two hearts plunge unsatiated into happiness, and clutch, and sink deeper.

Oh! these hours of afternoon girt with roses that twine around time, and rest against his benumbed flanks with cheeks aflower and aflame!

And nothing, nothing is better than to feel thus, still happy and serene, after how many years? But if our destiny had been quite different, and we had both been called upon to suffer—even then!—oh! I should have been happy to live and die, without complaining, in my stubborn love.

II

ROSES of June, you the fairest with your hearts
transfixed by the sun ; violent and tranquil
roses, like a delicate flock of birds settled on
the branches ;

Roses of June and July, upright and new,
mouths and kisses that suddenly move or grow
still with the coming and going of the wind,
caress of shadow and gold on the restless
garden ;

Roses of mute ardour and gentle will, roses
of voluptuousness in your mossy sheaths, you
who spend the days of high summer loving
each other in the brightness ;

Fresh, glowing, magnificent roses, all our
roses, oh ! that, like you, our manifold desires,
in our dear weariness or trembling pleasure,
might love and exalt each other and rest !

III

IF other flowers adorn the house and the splendour of the countryside, the pure ponds shine still in the grass with the great eyes of water of their mobile face.

Who can say from what far-off and unknown distances so many new birds have come with sun on their wings?

In the garden, April has given way to July, and the blue tints to the great carnation tints; space is warm and the wind frail; a thousand insects glisten joyously in the air; and summer passes in her robe of diamonds and sparks.

IV

THE darkness is lustral and the dawn iridescent.
From the lofty branch whence a bird flies, the
dew-drops fall.

A lucid and frail purity adorns a morning
so bright that prisms seem to gleam in the air.
A spring babbles ; a noise of wings is heard.

Oh ! how beautiful are your eyes at that
first hour when our silver ponds shimmer in
the light and reflect the day that is rising.
Your forehead is radiant and your blood beats.

Intense and wholesome life in all its divine
strength enters your bosom so completely, like
a driving happiness, that to contain its anguish
and its fury, your hands suddenly take mine,
and press them almost fearfully against your
heart.

V

I BRING you this evening, as an offering, my joy at having plunged my body into the silk and gold of the frank and joyous wind and the gorgeous sun; my feet are bright with having walked among the grasses; my hands sweet with having touched the heart of flowers; my eyes shining at having felt the tears suddenly well up and spring into them before the earth in festival and its eternal strength.

Space has carried me away drunken and fervent and sobbing in its arms of moving brightness; and I have passed I know not where, far away in the distance, with pent-up cries set free by my footsteps.

I bring you life and the beauty of the plains; breathe them on me in a good, frank breath; the marjoram has caressed my fingers, and the air and its light and its perfumes are in my flesh.

VI

LET us both sit down on the old worm-eaten bench near the path ; and let my hand remain a long while within your two steadfast hands.

With my hand that remains a long while given up to the sweet consciousness of being on your knees, my heart also, my earnest, gentle heart, seems to rest between your two kind hands.

And we share an intense joy and a deep love to feel that we are so happy together, without one over-strong word to come trembling to our lips, or one kiss even to go burning towards your brow.

And we would prolong the ardour of this silence and the stillness of our mute desires, were it not that suddenly, feeling them quiver, I clasp tightly, without willing it, your thinking hands ;

Your hands in which my whole happiness is hidden, and which would never, for anything in the world, deal violently with those deep things we live by, although in duty we do not speak of them.

VII

GENTLY, more gently still, cradle my head in your arms, my fevered brow and my weary eyes;

Gently, more gently still, kiss my lips, and say to me those words that are sweeter at each dawn when your voice repeats them, and you have surrendered, and I love you still.

The day rises sullen and heavy; the night was crossed by monstrous dreams; the rain and its long hair whip our casement, and the horizon is black with clouds of grief.

Gently, more gently still, cradle my head in your arms, my fevered brow and my weary eyes; you are my hopeful dawn, with its caress in your hands and its light in your sweet words;

See, I am re-born, without pain or shock, to the daily labour that traces its mark on my road, and instils into my life the will to be a weapon of strength and beauty in the golden grasp of an honoured life.

VIII

IN the house chosen by our love as its birth-place, with its cherished furniture peopling the shadows and the nooks, where we live together, having as sole witnesses the roses that watch us through the windows,

Certain days stand out of so great a consolation, certain hours of summer so lovely in their silence, that sometimes I stop time that swings with its golden disc in the oaken clock.

Then the hour, the day, the night is so much ours that the happiness that hovers lightly over us hears nothing but the throbbing of your heart and mine that are brought close together by a sudden embrace.

IX

THE pleasant task with the window open and the shadow of the green leaves and the passage of the sun on the ruddy paper, maintains the gentle violence of its silence in our good and pensive house.

And the flowers bend nimbly and the large fruits shine from branch to branch, and the blackbirds, the bullfinches and the chaffinches sing and sing, so that my verses may burst forth clear and fresh, pure and true, like their songs, their golden flesh and their scarlet petals.

And I see you pass in the garden, sometimes mingled with the sun and shadow; but your head does not turn, so that the hour in which I work jealousy at these frank and gentle poems may not be disturbed.

X

IN the depth of our love dwells all faith; we bind up a glowing thought together with the least things: the awakening of a bud, the decline of a rose, the flight of a frail and beautiful bird that, by turns, appears or disappears in the shadow or the light.

A nest falling to pieces on the mossy edge of a roof and ravaged by the wind fills the mind with dread. An insect eating the heart of the hollyhocks terrifies: all is fear, all is hope.

Though reason with its sharp and soothing snow may suddenly cool these charming pangs, what matters! Let us accept them without inquiring overmuch into the false, the true, the evil or the good they portend;

Let us be happy that we can be as children, believing in their fatal or triumphant power, and let us guard with closed shutters against too sensible people.

XI

DAWN, darkness, evening, space and the stars; that which the night conceals or shows between its veils is mingled with the fervour of our exalted being. Those who live with love live with eternity.

It matters not that their reason approve or scoff, and, upright on its high walls, hold out to them, along the quays and harbours, its bright torches; they are the travellers from beyond the sea.

Far off, farther than the ocean and its black floods, they watch the day break from shore to shore; fixed certainty and trembling hope present the same front to their ardent gaze.

Happy and serene, they believe eagerly; their soul is the deep and sudden brightness with which they burn the summit of the loftiest problems; and to know the world, they but scrutinize themselves.

They follow distant roads chosen by themselves, living with the truths enclosed within their simple, naked eyes, that are deep and gentle as the dawn; and for them alone there is still song in paradise.

XII

THIS is the holy hour when the lamp is lit: everything is calm and comforting this evening; and the silence is such that you could hear the falling of feathers.

This is the holy hour when gently the beloved comes, like the breeze or smoke, most gently, most slowly. At first, she says nothing—and I listen; and I catch a glimpse of her soul, that I hear wholly, shining and bursting forth; and I kiss her on the eyes.

This is the holy hour when the lamp is lit, when the acknowledgment of mutual love the whole day long is brought forth from the depths of our deep but transparent heart.

And we each tell the other of the simplest things: the fruit gathered in the garden, the flower that has opened between the green mosses; and the thought that has sprung from some sudden emotion at the memory of a faded word of affection found at the bottom of an old drawer on a letter of yesteryear.

XIII

THE dead kisses of departed years have put their seal on your face, and, beneath the melancholy and furrowing wind of age, many of the roses in your features have faded.

I see your mouth and your great eyes glow no more like a morning of festival, nor your head slowly recline in the black and massive garden of your hair.

Your dear hands, that remain so gentle, approach no more as in former years with light at their finger-tips to caress my forehead, as dawn the mosses.

Your young and lovely body that I adorned with my thoughts has no longer the pure freshness of dew, and your arms are no longer like the bright branches.

Alas! everything falls and fades ceaselessly; everything has changed, even your voice; your body has collapsed like a pavise, and let fall the victories of youth.

But nevertheless my steadfast and earnest heart says to you: what are to me the years made heavier day by day, since I know that nothing in the world will disturb our exalted life, and that our soul is too profound for love still to depend on beauty?

XIV

For fifteen years our thoughts have run together, and our fine and serene ardour has vanquished habit, the dull-voiced shrew whose slow, rough hands wear out the most stubborn and the strongest love.

I look at you and I discover you each day, so intimate is your gentleness or your pride: time indeed obscures the eyes of your beauty, but it exalts your heart, whose golden depths peep open.

Artlessly, you allow yourself to be probed and known, and your soul always appears fresh and new; with gleaming masts, like an eager caravel, our happiness covers the seas of our desires.

It is in us alone that we anchor our faith, to naked sincerity and simple goodness; we move and live in the brightness of a joyous and translucent trust.

Your strength is to be infinitely pure and frail; to cross with burning heart all dark roads, and to have preserved, in spite of mist or darkness, all the rays of the dawn in your childlike soul.

XV

I THOUGHT our joy benumbed for ever, like a sun faded before it was night, on the day that illness with its leaden arms dragged me heavily towards its chair of weariness.

The flowers and the garden were fear or deception to me; my eyes suffered to see the white noons flaming, and my two hands, my hands, seemed, before their time, too tired to hold captive our trembling happiness.

My desires had become no more than evil weeds; they bit at each other like thistles in the wind; I felt my heart to be at once ice and burning coal and of a sudden dried up and stubborn in forgiveness.

But you said the word that gently comforts, seeking it nowhere else than in your immense love; and I lived with the fire of your word, and at night warmed myself at it until the dawn of day.

The diminished man I felt myself to be, both to myself and all others, did not exist for you; you gathered flowers for me from the window-sill, and, with your faith, I believed in health.

And you brought to me, in the folds of your gown, the keen air, the wind of the fields and forests, and the perfumes of evening or the scents of dawn, and, in your fresh and deep-felt kisses, the sun.

XVI

EVERYTHING that lives about us in the fragile and gentle light, frail grasses, tender branches, hollyhocks, and the shadow that brushes them lightly by, and the wind that knots them, and the singing and hopping birds that swarm riotously in the sun like clusters of jewels,—everything that lives in the fine ruddy garden loves us artlessly, and we—we love everything.

We worship the lilies we see growing; and the tall sunflowers, brighter than the Nadir—circles surrounded by petals of flames—burn our souls through their glow.

The simplest flowers, the phlox and the lilac, grow along the walls among the feverfew, to be nearer to our footsteps; and the involuntary weeds in the turf over which we have passed open their eyes wet with dew.

And we live thus with the flowers and the grass, simple and pure, glowing and exalted, lost in our love, like the sheaves in the gold of the corn, and proudly allowing the imperious summer to pierce our bodies, our hearts and our two wills with its full brightness.

XVII

BECAUSE you came one day so simply along the paths of devotion and took my life into your beneficent hands, I love and praise and thank you with my senses, with my heart and brain, with my whole being stretched like a torch towards your unquenchable goodness and charity.

Since that day, I know what love, pure and bright as the dew, falls from you on to my calmed soul. I feel myself yours by all the burning ties that attach flames to their fire; all my body, all my soul mounts towards you with tireless ardour; I never cease to brood on your deep earnestness and your charm, so much so that suddenly I feel my eyes fill deliciously with unforgettable tears.

And I make towards you, happy and calm, with the proud desire to be for ever the most steadfast of joys to you. All our affection flames about us; every echo of my being responds to your call; the hour is unique and sanctified with ecstasy, and my fingers are tremulous at the mere touching of your forehead, as though they brushed the wing of your thoughts.

XVIII

ON days of fresh and tranquil health, when life is as fine as a conquest, the pleasant task sits down by my side like an honoured friend.

He comes from gentle, radiant countries, with words brighter than the dews, in which to set, illuminating them, our feelings and our thoughts.

He seizes our being in a mad whirlwind; he lifts up the mind on giant pilasters; he pours into it the fire that makes the stars live; he brings the gift of being God suddenly.

And fevered transports and deep terrors—all serves his tragic will to make young again the blood of beauty in the veins of the world.

I am at his mercy like a glowing prey.

Therefore, when I return, though wearied and heavy, to the repose of your love, with the fires of my vast and supreme idea, it seems to me—oh! but for a moment—that I am bringing to you in my panting heart the heart-beat of the universe itself.

XIX

OUT of the groves of sleep I came, somewhat morose because I had left you beneath their branches and their braided shadows, far from the glad morning sun.

Already the phlox and the hollyhocks glisten, and I wander in the garden dreaming of verses clear as crystal and silver that would ring in the light.

Then abruptly I return to you with so great a fervour and emotion that it seems to me as though my thought suddenly has already crossed from afar the leafy and heavy darkness of sleep to call forth your joy and your awakening.

And when I join you once more in our warm house that is still possessed by darkness and silence, my clear, frank kisses ring like a dawn-song in the valleys of your flesh.

XX

ALAS! when the lead of illness flowed in my benumbed veins with my heavy, sluggish blood, with my blood day by day heavier and more sluggish;

When my eyes, my poor eyes, followed peevishly on my long, pale hands the fatal marks of insidious malady;

When my skin dried up like bark, and I had no longer even strength enough to press my fiery lips against your heart, and there kiss our happiness;

When sad and identical days morosely gnawed my life, I might never have found the will and the strength to hold out stoically,

Had you not, each hour of the so long weeks, poured into my daily body with your patient, gentle, placid hands the secret heroism that flowed in yours.

XXI

OUR bright garden is health itself.

It is squandered in its brightness from the thousand hands of the branches and leaves as they wave to and fro.

And the pleasant shade that welcomes our feet after the long roads pours into our tired limbs a quickening strength, gentle as the garden's mosses.

When the pond plays with the wind and the sun, a ruddy heart seems to dwell in the depths of the water, and to beat, ardent and young, with the ripples; and the tall, straight gladioli and the glowing roses that move in their splendour hold out their golden goblets of red blood at the end of their living stalks.

Our bright garden is health itself.

XXII

It was June in the garden, our hour and our day, and our eyes looked upon all things with so great a love that the roses seemed to us to open gently, and to see and love us.

The sky was purer than it had ever been: the insects and birds floated in the gold and gladness of an air as frail as silk, and our kisses were so exquisite that they gave an added beauty to the sunshine and the birds.

It was as though our happiness had suddenly become azure, and required the whole sky wherein to shine; through gentle openings, all life entered our being, to expand it.

And we were nothing but invocatory cries, and wild raptures, and vows and entreaties, and the need, suddenly, to recreate the gods, in order to believe.

XXIII

THE gift of yourself no longer satisfies you ; you are prodigal of yourself : the rapture that bears you on to ever greater love springs up in you ceaselessly and untiringly, and carries you ever higher towards the wide heaven of perfect love.

A clasp of the hands, a gentle look impassions you ; and your heart appears to me so suddenly lovely that I am afraid sometimes of your eyes and your lips, and that I am unworthy and that you love me too much.

Ah ! these bright ardours of an affection too lofty for a poor human being who has only a poor heart, all moist with regrets, all thorny with faults, to feel their passing and dissolve in tears.

XXIV

Oh! the calm summer garden where nothing moves! Unless it be, near the middle of the bright and radiant pond, the goldfish like tongues of fire.

They are our memories playing in our thoughts that are calm and stilled and limpid, like the trustful and restful water.

And the water brightens and the fishes leap at the abrupt and marvellous sun, not far from the green irises and the white shells and stones, motionless about the ruddy edges.

And it is sweet to watch them thus come and go in the freshness and splendour that touches them lightly, careless and without fear that they will bring from the depths to the surface other regrets than fleeting.

XXV

As with others, an hour has its ill-humour: the peevish hour or a malevolent humour has sometimes stamped our hearts with its black seals; and yet, in spite of all, even at the close of the darkest days, never have our hearts said the irrevocable words.

A radiant and glowing sincerity was our joy and counsel, and our passionate soul found therein ever new strength, as in a ruddy flood.

And we recounted each to the other our wretchedest woes, telling them like some harsh rosary, as we stood facing one another, with our love rising in sobs; and our two mouths, at each avowal, gently and in turn kissed our faults on the lips that uttered them aloud.

Thus, very simply, without baseness or bitter words, we escaped from the world and from ourselves, sparing ourselves all grief and gnawing cares, and watching the rebirth of our soul, as the purity of glass and gold of a window-pane is reborn after the rain, when the sun warms it and gently dries it.

XXVI

THE golden barks of lovely summer that set out, riotous for space, are returning sad and weary from the blood-stained horizons.

With monotonous strokes of the oars, they advance upon the waters ; they are as cradles in which sleep autumn flowers.

Stalks of lilies with golden brows, you all lie overthrown ; alone, the roses struggle to live beyond death.

What matters to their full beauty that October shine or April : their simple and puerile desire drinks all light until the blood comes.

Even on the blackest days, when the sky dies, they strive towards Christmas, beneath a harsh and haggard cloud, the moment the first ray darts through.

You, our souls, do as they ; they have not the pride of the lilies ; but within their folds they guard a holy and immortal ardour.

XXVII

ARDOUR of senses, ardour of hearts, ardour of souls, vain words created by those who diminish love ; sun, you do not distinguish among your flames those of evening, of dawn, or of noon !

You walk blinded by your own light in the torrid azure under the great arched skies, knowing nothing, unless it be that your strength is all-powerful and that your fire labours at the divine mysteries.

For love is an act of ceaseless exaltation. O you whose gentleness bathes my proud heart, what need to weigh the pure gold of our dream ? I love you altogether, with my whole being.

XXVIII

THE still beauty of summer evenings on the greenswards where they lie outspread holds out to us, without empty gesture or words, a symbol of rest in gladness.

Young morning and its tricks has gone away with the breezes; noon itself and the velvet skirts of its warm winds, of its heavy winds, no longer sweeps the torrid plain; and this is the hour when, without a branch's moving or a pond's ruffling its waters, the evening slowly comes from the tops of the mountains and takes its seat in the garden.

O the infinite golden flatness of the waters, and the trees and their shadows on the reeds, and the calm and sumptuous silence in whose still presence we so greatly delight that we desire to live with it always or to die of it and revive by it, like two imperishable hearts tirelessly drunken with brightness.

XXIX

You said to me, one evening, words so beautiful that doubtless the flowers that leaned towards us suddenly loved us, and one among them, in order to touch us both, fell upon our knees.

You spoke to me of a time nigh at hand when our years like over-ripe fruit would be ready for the gathering, how the knell of destiny would ring out, and how we should love each other, feeling ourselves growing old.

Your voice enfolded me like a dear embrace, and your heart burned so quietly beautiful, that at that moment I could have seen without fear the beginning of the tortuous roads that lead to the tomb.

XXX

“Hours of bright morning,” “Hours of afternoon,” hours that stand out superbly and gently, whose dance lengthens along our warm garden-paths, saluted at passing by our golden rose-trees; summer is dying and autumn coming in.

Hours girt with blossom, will you ever return?

Yet, if destiny, that wields the stars, spares us its pains, its blows and its disasters, perhaps one day you will return, and, before my eyes, interweave in measure your radiant steps;

And I will mingle with your glowing, gentle dance, winding in shade and sun over the lawns—like a last, immense and supreme hope—the steps and farewells of my “hours of evening.”

THE HOURS OF EVENING



I

DAINTY flowers, like a froth of foam, grew along the borders of our paths; the wind fell and the air seemed to brush your hands and hair with plumes.

The shade was kindly to us as we walked in step beneath the leafage; a child's song reached us from a village, and filled all the infinite.

Our ponds were outspread in their autumn splendour under the guard of the long reeds, and the lofty, swaying crown on the woods' fine brow was mirrored in the waters.

And both knowing that our hearts were brooding together on the same thought, we reflected that it was our calmed life that was revealed to us in this lovely evening.

For one supreme moment, you saw the festival sky deck itself out and say farewell to us; and for a long, long while you gave it your eyes filled to the brim with mute caresses.

II

If it were true that a garden flower or a meadow tree could keep some memory of lovers of other times who admired them in their bloom or their vigour, our love in this hour of long regret would come and entrust to the rose or erect in the oak, before the approach of death, its sweetness or its strength.

Thus it would survive, victor over funereal care, in the tranquil godship conferred on it by simple things ; it would still enjoy the pure brightness cast on life by a summer dawn and the soft rain hanging to the leaves.

And if on a fine evening, out of the depths of the plain, a couple came along, holding hands, the oak would stretch out its broad and powerful shade like a wing over their path, and the rose would waft them its frail perfume.

III

THE wistaria is faded and the hawthorn dead ; but this is the season of the heather in flower, and on this calm and gentle evening the caressing wind brings you the perfumes of poor Campine.

Love them and breathe them in while brooding over its fate ; its soil is bare and harsh and the wind wars on it ; pools make their holes in it ; the sand preys on it, and the little left to it, it yet gives.

Once in autumn, we lived with it, with its plain and its woods, with its rain and its sky, even to December when the Christmas angels crossed its legend with mighty strokes of their wings.

Your heart became more steadfast there, simpler and more human ; we loved the people of its old villages, and the women who spoke to us of their great age and of spinning-wheels fallen from use, worn out by their hands.

Our calm house on the misty heath was bright to look upon and ready in its welcome ; and dear to us were its roof and its door and its threshold and its hearth blackened by the smoky peat.

When night spread out its total splendour over the vast and pale and innumerable somnolence, the silence taught us lessons, the glow of which our soul has never forgotten.

Because we felt more lonely in the vast

plain, the dawns and the evenings sank more deeply into us; our eyes were franker, our hearts were gentler and filled to the brim with the fervour of the world.

We found happiness by not asking for it; even the sadness of the days was good for us, and the few sun-rays of that end of autumn gladdened us all the more because they seemed weak and tired.

The wistaria is faded and the hawthorn dead; but this is the season of the heather in flower. This evening, remember, and let the caressing wind bring you the perfumes of poor Campine.

IV

DRAW up your chair near mine, and stretch your hands out towards the hearth that I may see between your fingers the old flame burning; and watch the fire quietly with your eyes that fear no light, that they may be for me still franker when a quick and flashing ray strikes to their depths, illuminating them.

Oh! how beautiful and young still our life is when the clock rings out with its golden tone, and, coming closer, I brush you lightly and touch you, and a slow and gentle fever that neither desires to allay leads the sure and wondrous kiss from the hands to the forehead and from the forehead to the lips.

How I love you then, my bright beloved, in your welcoming, gently swooning body, that encircles me in its turn and dissolves me in its gladness! Everything becomes dearer to me—your mouth, your arms, your kindly breasts where my poor, tired forehead will lie quietly near your heart after the moment of riotous pleasure that you grant me.

For I love you still better after the sensual hour, when your goodness, still more steadfast and maternal, makes for me a soft repose, following sharp ardour, and when, after desire has cried out its violence, I hear approaching our regular happiness with steps so gentle that they are but silence.

V

BE once more merciful and cheering to us, light, pale brightness of winter that will bathe our brows when of an afternoon we both go into the garden to breathe in one last warmth.

We loved you long ago with so great a pride, with so great a love springing from our hearts, that one supreme and gentle and kindly flame is due to us at this hour when grief awaits us.

You are that which no man ever forgets, from the day when you first struck his victorious arms, and when, on the coming of evening, you slept in his eyes with your dead splendour and vanquished strength.

And for us you were always the visible fervour that, being everywhere diffused and shining in fevers of deep and stinging ardour, seemed to start for the infinite from our heart.

VI

ALAS! the days of the crimson phlox and of the proud roses that brightened its gates are far away, but however faded and withered it may be—what matters!—I love our garden still with all my heart.

Its distress is sometimes dearer and sweeter to me than was its gladness in the burning summer days. Oh! the last perfume slowly rendered up by its last flower on its last mosses!

I wandered this evening among its winding pathways, to touch with my earnest fingers all its plants; and falling on my knees amid the trembling grasses, I gave a long kiss to its damp and heavy soil.

And now let it die, and the mist and night come and spread over all; all my being seems to have entered into our garden's ruin, and, by understanding its death, I shall learn to know my own.

VII

THE evening falls, the moon is golden.

Before the day ends, go gaily into the garden and pluck with your gentle hands the few flowers that have not yet bowed sadly towards the earth.

Though their leaves may be wan, what matters! I admire them and you love them, and their petals are beautiful, in spite of all, on the stalks that bear them.

And you went away into the distance among the box-trees, along a monotonous path, and the nosegay that you plucked trembled in your hand and suddenly quivered; and then your dreaming fingers devoutly gathered together these glimmering autumn roses and wove them with tears into a pale and bright and supple crown.

The last light lit up your eyes, and your long step became sad and silent.

And slowly in the twilight you returned with empty hands to the house, leaving not far from our door, on a damp, low hillock, the white circle that your fingers had formed.

And I understood then that in the weary garden wherethrough the winds will soon pass like squadrons, you desired for the last time to adorn with flowers our youth that lies there dead.

VIII

WHEN your hand, on an evening of the sluggish months, commits to the odorous cupboards the fruits of your orchard, I seem to see you calmly arranging our old perfumed and sweet-tasting memories.

And my relish for them returns, as it was in former years in the gold and the sun and with the wind on my lips; and then I see a thousand moments done and gone, and their gladness and their laughter and their cries and their fevers.

The past reawakens with so great a desire to be the present still, with its life and strength, that the hardly extinguished fires suddenly burn my body, and my heart rejoices to the point of swooning.

O beautiful luminous fruits in these autumn shadows, jewels fallen from the heavy necklace of russet summer, splendours that light up our monotonous hours, what a ruddy and spacious awakening you stir up in us!

IX

AND now that the lofty leaves have fallen, that kept our garden sheltered beneath their shade, through the bare branches can be seen beyond them the roofs of the old villages climbing towards the horizon.

So long as summer poured out its gladness, none of us saw them grouped so near our door ; but now that the flowers and the leaves are withered, we often brood on them with gentle thoughts.

Other people live there between stone walls, behind a worn threshold protected by a coping, having as sole friends but the wind and the rain and the lamp shining with its friendly light.

In the darkness at the fall of evening, when the fire awakens and the clock in which time swings is hushed, doubtless, as much as we, they love the silence, to feel themselves thinking through their eyes.

Nothing disturbs for them or for us those hours of deep and quiet and tender intimacy wherein the moment that was is blessed for having been, and of which the coming hour is always the best.

Indeed, how they also clench the old happiness, made up of pain and joy, within their trembling hands ; they know each other's bodies that have grown old together, and each other's looks worn out by the same sorrows.

The roses of their life, they love them faded,

with their dead glory and their last perfume and the heavy memory of their dead brightness falling away, leaf by leaf, in the garden of the years.

Against black winter, like hermits, they stay crouching within their human fervour, and nothing disheartens them and nothing leads them to complain of the days they no longer possess.

Oh! the quiet people in the depths of old villages! Indeed, do we not feel them neighbours of our heart! And do we not find in their eyes our tears and in their courage our strength and ardour!

They are there beneath their roof, seated around fires, or lingering sometimes at their window-sill; and on this evening of spacious, floating wind, perhaps they have thought of us what we think of them.

X

WHEN the starry sky covers our dwelling, we hush for hours before its intense and gentle fire, so that we may feel a greater and more fervent stirring within us.

The great silver stars follow their courses high up in the heavens; beneath the flames and the gleams, night spreads out its depths, and the calm is so great that the ocean listens!

But what matters even the hushing of the sea, if in the brightness and immensity of space, full of invisible violence, our hearts beat so strongly that they make all the silence?

XI

WITH the same love that you were for me long ago a garden of splendour whose wavering coppices shaded the long grass and the docile roses, you are for me in these black days a calm and steadfast sanctuary.

All is centred there : your fervour and your brightness and your movements assembling the flowers of your goodness ; but all is drawn together closely in a deep peace against the sharp winds piercing the winter of the world.

My happiness keeps warm there within your folded arms ; your pretty, artless words, in their gladness and familiarity, sing still with as great a charm to my ears as in the days of the white lilac or of the red currants.

Oh ! I feel your gay and shining cheerfulness triumphing day by day over the sorrow of the years, and you yourself smile at the silver threads that slip their waving network into your glossy hair.

When your head bends to my deep-felt kiss, what does it matter to me that your brow is furrowed, and that your hands are becoming ridged with hard veins when I hold them between my two steadfast hands !

You never complain, and you believe firmly that nothing true dies when love receives its meed, and that the living fire on which our soul feeds consumes even grief to increase its flame.

XII

THE flowers of bright welcome along the wall await us no longer when we go indoors, and our silken ponds whose smooth waters chafe lie outstretched no more beneath pure, soft skies.

All the birds have fled our monotonous plains, and pallid fogs float over the marshes. O those two cries: autumn, winter! winter, autumn! Do you hear the dead wood falling in the forest?

No more is our garden the husband of light, whence the phlox were seen springing towards their glory; our fiery gladioli are mingled with the earth, and have lain down in their length to die.

Everything is nerveless and void of beauty; everything is flameless and passes and flees and bends and sinks down unsupported. Oh! give me your eyes lit up by your soul that I may seek in them in spite of all a corner of the old sky.

In them alone our light lives still, the light that covered all the garden long ago, when it exulted with the white pride of our lilies and the climbing ardour of our hollyhocks.

XIII

WHEN the fine snow with its sparkling grains silts over our threshold, I hear your footsteps wander and stop in the neighbouring room.

You withdraw the bright and fragile mirror from its place by the window, and your bunch of keys dances along the drawer of the beech-wood wardrobe.

I listen, and you are poking the fire and arousing the embers; and you are arranging about the silent walls the silence of the chairs.

You remove the fleeting dust from the workbasket with the narrow feet, and your ring strikes and resounds on the quivering sides of a wine-glass.

And I am more happy than ever this evening at your tender presence, and at feeling you near and not seeing you and ever hearing you.

XIV

IF fate has saved us from commonplace errors and from vile untruth and from sorry shams, it is because all constraint that might have bowed our double fervour revolted us.

You went your way, free and frank and bright, mingling with the flowers of love the flowers of your will, and gently lifting up towards yourself its lofty spirit when my brow was bent towards fear or doubt.

And you were always kind and artless in your acts, knowing that my heart was for ever yours ; for if I loved—do I now know?—some other woman, it is to your heart that I always returned.

Your eyes were then so pure in their tears that my being was stirred to sincerity and truth ; and I repeated to you holy and gentle words, and your weapons were sadness and forgiveness.

And in the evening I lulled my head to sleep on your bright bosom, happy at having returned from false and dim distances to the fragrant spring that bore sway in us, and I remained a captive in your open arms.

XV

No, my heart has never tired of you.

In the time of June, long ago, you said to me: "If I knew, friend, if I knew that my presence one day might be a burden to you—with my poor heart and sorrowful thoughts, I would go away, no matter where."

And gently your forehead rose towards my kiss.

And you said to me again: "Bonds loosen always and life is so full, and what matters if the chain is golden that ties to the same ring in port our two human barks!"

And gently your tears revealed to me your grief.

And you said and you said again: "Let us separate, let us separate before the evil days; our life has been too lofty to drag it trivially from fault to fault."

And you fled and you fled, and my two hands desperately held you back.

No, my heart has never tired of you.

XVI

How happy we are still and proud of living when the least ray of sunshine glimpsed in the heavens lights up for a moment the poor flowers of rime that the hard and delicate frost engraved on our window-panes.

Rapture leaps in us and hope carries us away, and our old garden appears to us again, in spite of its long paths strewn with dead branches, living and pure and bright and full of golden gleams.

Something shining and undaunted, I know not what, creeps into our blood; and in the quick kisses that, ardently, frantically, we give each other, we re-embody the immensity and fulness of summer.

XVII

SHALL we suffer, alas! the dead weight of the years until at length we are no more than two quiet people, exchanging the harmless kisses of children at evening when the fire flames in the hollow of the chimney?

Shall our dear furniture see us drag ourselves with slow steps from the hearth to the beechen chest, support ourselves by the wall to reach the window, and huddle our tottering bodies on heavy seats?

If our wreck is to appear one day in such guise, while numbness deadens our brains and our arms, we shall not bemoan, in spite of evil fate, and we shall hold our tears pent up in our breasts.

For even so, we shall still keep our eyes with which to gaze on the day that follows night, and to see the dawn and the sun shed their radiance on life, and make a wonderful object of the earth.

XVIII

THE small happenings, the thousand nothings, a letter, a date, a humble anniversary, a word said once again as in days long ago uplift your heart and mine in these long evenings.

And we celebrate for ourselves these simple things, and we count and recount our old treasures, so that the little of us that we still keep may remain steadfast and brave before the sullen hour.

And more than is fitting, we show ourselves solicitous of these poor, gentle, kindly joys that sit down on the bench near the flaming fire with winter flowers on their thin knees.

And they take from the chest where their goodness hides it the bright bread of happiness that was allotted to us, and of which Love in our house has so long eaten that he loves it even to the crumbs.

XIX

COME even to our threshold, scattering your white ash, O peaceful, slowly falling snow: the lime-tree in the garden holds all its branches bowed, and the light calandra dissolves in the sky no longer.

O snow, who warm and protect the barely rising corn with the moss and wool that you spread from plain to plain! Silent snow, the gentle friend of the houses asleep in the calm of morning:

Cover our roof and lightly touch our windows, and suddenly enter by the door over the threshold with your pure flakes and your dancing flames,

O snow, luminous through our soul, snow, who also warm our last dreams like the rising corn!

XX

WHEN our bright garden was gay with all its flowers, the regret at having shrunk our hearts sprang from our lips in moments of passion; and forgiveness, offered but deserved always, and the exaggerated display of our wretchedness and so many tears moistening our sad, sincere eyes uplifted our love.

But in these months of heavy rain, when everything huddles together and makes itself small, when brightness itself tires of thrusting back shadow and night, our soul is no longer vibrant and strong enough to confess our faults with rapture.

We tell them in slow speech; in truth, with affection still, but at the fall of the evening and no longer at dawn; sometimes even we count them on our ten fingers like things that we number and arrange in the house, and to lessen their folly or their number we debate them.

XXI

WITH my old hands lifted to your forehead, during your brief sleep by the black hearth this evening, I part your hair, and I kiss the fervour of your eyes hidden beneath your long lashes.

Oh! the sweet affection of this day's end! My eyes follow the years that have completed their course, and suddenly your life appears so perfect in them that my love is moved by a touching respect.

And as in the time when you were my betrothed, the desire comes back to me again in all its ardour to fall on my knees, and with fingers as chaste as my thoughts to touch the place where your gentle heart beats.

XXII

IF our hearts have burned in uplifting days with a love as bright as it was lofty, age now makes us slack and indulgent and mild before our faults.

You no longer make us greater, O youthful will, with your unsubdued ardour, and our life is coloured now with gentle calm and pale kindliness.

We are at the setting of your sun, love, and we mask our weakness with the commonplace words and poor speeches of an empty, tardy wisdom.

Oh! how sad and shameful would the future be for us if from our winter and our mistiness there did not break out like a torch the memory of the high-spirited souls we once were.

XXIII

IN this rugged winter when the floating sun founders on the horizon like a heavy wreck, I love to say your name, with its slow, solemn tone, as the clock echoes with the deep strokes of time.

And the more I say it, the more ravished is my voice, so much so that from my lips it descends into my heart and awakens in me a more glowing happiness than the sweetest words I have spoken in my life.

And before the new dawn or the evening falling to sleep, I repeat it with my voice that is ever the same, but oh! with what strength and supreme ardour shall I pronounce it at the hour of death!

XXIV

PERHAPS, when my last day comes, perhaps, if only for a moment, a frail and quavering sun will stoop down at my window.

My hands then, my poor faded hands, will even so be gilded once again by his glory; he will touch my mouth and my forehead a last time with his slow, bright, deep kiss; and the pale, but still proud flowers of my eyes will return his light before they close.

Sun, have I not worshipped your strength and your brightness! My torrid, gentle art, in its supreme achievement has held you captive in the heart of my poems; like a field of ripe wheat that surges in the summer wind, this page and that of my books confers life on you and exalts you:

O Sun, who bring forth and deliver, O immense friend of whom our pride has need, be it that at the new, solemn and imperious hour when my old human heart will be heavy under the proof, you will come once more to visit it and witness.

XXV

OH! how gentle are your hands and their slow caress winding about my neck and gliding over my body, when I tell you at the fall of evening how my strength grows heavy day by day with the lead of my weakness!

You do not wish me to become a shadow and a wreck like those who go towards the darkness, even though they carry a laurel in their mournful hands and fame sleeping in their hollow chest.

Oh! how you soften the law of time for me, and how comforting and generous to me is your dream; for the first time, with an untruth you lull my heart, that forgives you and thanks you for it,

Well knowing, nevertheless, that all ardour is vain against all that is and all that must be, and that, by finishing in your eyes my fine human life, may perhaps be found a deep happiness.

XXVI

WHEN you have closed my eyes to the light, kiss them with a long kiss, for they will have given you in the last look of their last fervour the utmost passionate love.

Beneath the still radiance of the funeral torch, bend down towards the farewell in them your sad and beautiful face, so that the only image they will keep in the tomb may be imprinted on them and may endure.

And let me feel, before the coffin is nailed up, our hands meet once again on the pure, white bed, and your cheek rest one last time against my forehead on the pale cushions.

And let me afterwards go far away with my heart, which will preserve so fiery a love for you that the other dead will feel its glow even through the compact, dead earth!



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